

## Alaska

### Anchorage Field Office Manages Campbell Tract Potential Fire Hazards

After two years of creating fire breaks, removing slash and creating defensible space, the Bureau of Land Management's Campbell Tract fire protection program has fallen prey to winter.

The 730 acre Campbell Tract is located in the heart of Anchorage, Alaska, a city of roughly 300,000 people. It is a key administrative site and is also heavily used by the public for a variety of recreation activities such as dog sledding, cross country skiing, horseback riding, skijoring, running, biking, wildlife watching, and hiking.



*The map shows the location of BLM's 730-acre Campbell Tract within the Municipality of Anchorage. The area is heavily used by the public for recreation and by schools for outdoor education.*

Winter didn't cooperate with BLM fire management specialist Brian Sterbenz's slash pile burn projects that would have wrapped up his efforts to create defensible space on the tract. Anchorage experienced a weather anomaly during the winter of 2003 with a late first snow, rain and 40-degree temperatures for many consecutive days in January and February.

This project is crucial because a decade-long spruce bark beetle epidemic in south central Alaska killed or severely injured many white spruce trees, increasing the danger of wildfires in the area.

The BLM Anchorage Field Office manages Campbell Tract, which is surrounded on the north, south and east by Municipality of Anchorage land. If a fire occurs and escapes the tract, municipal land will be threatened. Fire from the surrounding area could also threaten the tract.

In August 2001, BLM began reducing fuel sources and fire hazards to create defensible space. "Given the proximity to trails and public recreation areas on Campbell Tract, the goal was to create an effective fuel break that is also aesthetically pleasing," said Sterbenz.

Black and white spruce stands were thinned to a minimum spacing of six feet. All dead trees in a corridor 80 feet wide were removed. The lower branches on the remaining spruce trees were pruned to five feet to eliminate ladder fuels. The remaining areas were piled for burning after the first snowfall. The municipality requires at least six inches of snow covering the ground before burning slash. Wind, weather and other elements are factored in to the decision to burn. No live hardwoods were cut.



*BLM thinned an area with thick fuels to provide a barrier to help protect resources such as its communication site pictured here.*



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The BLM also created defensible space around facilities at Campbell Tract by removing hazardous fuels 40 to 60 feet away from the dominant tree species that are dead white and black spruce as well as dense black spruce stands. Hazard trees were removed an average of one tree height from the edge of a trail or road surface on recreation and access roads to enhance safety.

Not only was slash being burned but also slash that was accessible via the road was chipped and removed by a local contractor.

The Municipality of Anchorage and BLM have coordinated and assisted each other with fuel mitigation efforts because the fuel breaks cross jurisdictional boundaries. The municipality plans to continue constructing fuel breaks throughout the area in the upcoming season.

Contact: Donna Gindle, 907-267-1420

## Alaska Fire Service Planning Prescribed Fires

BLM's Alaska Fire Service will have a full menu of prescribed fires this spring. Starting as soon as the snow melts, crews will be out at various sites conducting beneficial burning in areas where hazard fuels can be removed and wildlife habitat improved.

Several of the projects are on military bases at Fairbanks, Anchorage and Delta Junction.

In Fairbanks, crews will burn the small arms range on Fort Wainwright in early spring. The range is usually burned every year or two to prevent munitions rounds from igniting vegetation later in the season and causing persistent smoke or fire problems. Ammunition bunkers are also burned on a semi-yearly basis.

Later in the summer, if weather and fire conditions cooperate, prescribed fires will be conducted at some of the larger ordnance ranges on Fort Wainwright. The Texas Range at 1,000 acres, Stuart Creek at 2,000 acres, Manchu Range at 350 acres and the Husky Drop Zone at 200 acres, are being planned. A series of prescribed fires totaling about 800 acres is being planned at Fort Richardson in Anchorage, and a 3-acre burn for a grouse habitat project is planned on Fort Wainwright.

In addition to these projects, Alaska Fire Service is working with the U.S. Army-Alaska on mitigation of



Alaska fire crewmembers conduct a prescribed burn near Fairbanks.



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fire dangers for a major range expansion project on Fort Greely near Delta Junction.

Another project will protect the city of Fairbanks from a repeat of a disastrous flood such as occurred in 1967. Grass growth on the spillway at the Chena Lakes Flood Control Project is burned every couple of years to keep brush down and maintain the carrying capacity of the spillway. Prescribed burning is also planned for units adjacent to the spillway to promote grasses and moose browse.

Plans are also in place for a large prescribed fire in the Alphabet Hills area in the Glennallen BLM District about 55 miles northeast of Glennallen. The burn units, which may be burned in multiple years, total about 56,000 acres. Approximately 333,000 acres are within the Maximum Allowable Perimeter. The area is predominantly late stage black spruce. Wetter, cooler weather in the region has not yet opened a window of opportunity to complete the burn project. When done, the prescribed fire will break up continuous fuels in the area and provide habitat for moose and other wildlife.

Contact: Andy Williams, 907-356-5511



Winter weather provided good conditions for burning slash.

## Montana

### Yellowstone River Ranch Project

In cooperation with local landowners, the BLM Billings and Miles City field offices initiated a fuel reduction project at the Yellowstone River Ranch in October of 2002. The fuel reduction project entailed creating a fire break in a heavily timbered area containing rapidly growing subdivision 60 miles southwest of Billings, Montana. The purpose of the fire break is not to stop a fire, but to move it down to the ground level where it can be more easily controlled.



Montana BLM crews thinned heavy fuels at the Yellowstone River Ranch community.

The 30 acre project began in the fall of 2002 and involved both public and private land. BLM crews thinned the area with chainsaws, piled the slash by hand, and then burned it to open up the canopy of ponderosa pine and Rocky Mountain juniper to reduce the chance of a stand-replacement fire. Before burning, local residents were able to gather slash to use for firewood.



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*Slash piled for burning after thinning work.*

The workforce for burning the piles consisted of one volunteer fire department crew member, two smokejumpers from Boise, Idaho, BLM staff from both the Billings and the Miles City field offices, and fire crews from Arizona.

To date, 25 of the 30 acres have been burned. Approximately five acres of slash are still curing and will be burned later this spring.

Since the project area is near Interstate 90, BLM collaborated with the Montana Department of Transportation before burning in case smoke reached the highway. No problems occurred, but the cooperation with the state agency was beneficial.

The subdivision's homeowners association also contributed to the project's success.

## Montana and Dakotas East Zone Fort Meade, South Dakota

After numerous fires last summer that affected the counties of Lawrence and Meade, the Fort Meade Fuels Module team swung into action by providing homeowners and their families with "Educational Awareness." Helpful and comprehensive

information about how homeowners can prevent their homes from being destroyed by wildfire in the wildland urban interface was made available to the public.

The fuels module team was given the assignment of making local contacts with businesses, public schools, colleges and homeowner associations. Presentation boards were made that included pictures from the Grizzly Gulch Fire, a fuels reduction project and some prescribed burning done during the fall season.

Team members wanted to show actual pictures of local lands that were being treated and the progress made to protect adjacent private land.

The Fuels Module team also worked with members of the Lead, South Dakota Fire Department. The two organizations combined their skills and knowledge to give the local residents as much information as possible. Pamphlets with information about survivable space and fire in the environment were distributed.



*BLM crew met with the public at a local shopping center to talk about fire safe homes.*



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The Fort Meade crew set up presentation boards at local business locations to meet the public. They also visited the Sturgis Middle School and Black Hills State University in Spearfish, South Dakota. Visual computer presentations were made illustrating an overview of BLM capabilities and fire in the environment. Both the middle school and the college found the presentation to be interesting. Sixth graders showed great interest in the fire aspect, and college students seemed to lean towards environmental concerns. A number of college students had questions on how to get a job with BLM.



*Members of the fuels team and Lead, South Dakota fire department.*

In February BLM teamed up with local, county, state and federal partners to host an open house to present the proposed Exemption Area Wildland Urban Interface Project for the Lead/Deadwood Area. Even though winter weather hit on the scheduled day, many members of the public attended.



The job of educating the public became a “learning” experience for all of the Fort Meade team. The time spent with the public proved to be highly beneficial. Because the BLM team is implementing a new program in the Dakotas, these public appearances helped to gain recognition for the team and to show the community steps are being taken to reduce the threat of fire.

*Team members developed a logo to help with public understanding of their work.*

## Wyoming

### National Public Lands Day Muddy Mountain Forest Health Project

On September 29, 2002, the Natrona County, Wyoming High School Reserve Officer Training Corps, Army National Guard, and Bureau of Land Management joined forces to conduct fuels reduction work within the Muddy Mountain Environmental Education Area in celebration of National Public Lands Day.



Students moved and prepared slash piles while learning about forestry and fuels reduction.

*ROTC students and BLM work on Muddy Mountain Forest Health Project.*



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Activities began at 10 a.m. and ended at 4:30 p.m. The National Guard provided transportation for the students, and lunch was provided for participants by BLM.

This is the second year that Reserve Officer Training Corps students have participated in National Public Lands Day and worked on this project. Students removed a half mile of buck and rail fencing, gathered 12 cords of wood, and cleaned up five acres of land that had been thinned.

*Students participate in National Public Lands Day project.*



“It’s a fun project,” said student Latisha Grimm. “It helps with our leadership skills and teamwork.”

Students were later presented with the Governor’s 2002 National Public Lands Day Proclamation in recognition of their work on the Muddy Mountain Fuels Reduction Project the past two years.



Contact Lesley Collins, (307) 261-7603

## Cooperative Wildland Urban Interface Hazard Mitigation

In 2001, personnel from the Wyoming BLM’s Northern Fire Management Zone and The Nature Conservancy’s Ten Sleep Preserve evaluated the fuels hazard on public and private land adjacent to the preserve’s headquarters facilities. They determined that the headquarters would be at risk if a wildfire were to occur in the area. With a history of high frequency lightning ignitions, the agencies decided it was necessary to act quickly.

Together they designed a fuels reduction project on both the preserve property and the adjacent public land. The project consisted of two parts. The first part involved thinning of overstocked

ponderosa pine stands heavily colonized with juniper, then hand piling the cut material. The second part of the project involves the shredding of heavy sagebrush concentrations and juniper removal along the main travel corridor into the Ten Sleep Preserve.

Planning for the project was completed and the contract for thinning and piling was awarded last September to a local contractor. Work began in December because of the relatively open winter conditions. The contract specified removing all conifer species down to a stocking level of 50 trees per acre with ponderosa pine as the preferred tree to remain. Amazingly, just by removing the juniper colonization easily achieved the desired stocking level. By removing the



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*A contractor removes encroaching juniper.*

conifers, the Aspen stands also benefited. Once all the thinning and piling is complete the Nature Conservancy staff will dispose of the slash and maintain the stand structure using prescribed fire.

A private labor crew worked on the main route into the Ten Sleep Preserve. The objective was to shred heavy concentrations of sagebrush and small juniper along the road, breaking up the fuel continuity where the public and private land adjoins. Along with the sagebrush shredding the contractor will also cut and chip all the larger juniper trees. BLM plans to concentrate the chipped material in certain locations and publicize its availability as a demonstration. It is hoped the general public will remove the chipped residue for mulch.

The project is an excellent example of two different entities with a common vision for fire management reaching a goal together. The project is also a part of The Nature Conservancy's Fire Learning Network, a two year program funded under The National Fire Plan designed to bring partners together towards the common goal of working collaboratively on fuels management problems.

Contact Janine Terry (307) 347-5194



*Tractor with mower cuts sage and juniper.*



*Snow laden juniper piles in the foreground await burning in the spring.*



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